

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L HONG KONG 5353

PEKING FOR CROSS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SREF, VS, HK

SUBJECT: VIETNAMESE REFUGEES IN HONG KONG

SUMMARY: HKG HAS ISSUED A PRESS STATEMENT ON MS. PARKER'S REPORT ON HONG KONG'S POSSIBLE WILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT RE-SETTLEMENT OF SOME VIETNAMESE LOCALLY. IN THE STATEMENT AND IN PRACTICE, HKG IS ATTEMPTING TO "INTERNATIONALIZE" THE PROBLEM AND IS PRESSING OTHER COUNTRIES TO ACCEPT THOSE WITH WHOM THEY HAVE TIES. FOR THE REMAINDER, HKG MIGHT BE HELPFUL BUT PUBLIC DISCUSSION OF THIS POSSIBILITY AT THE PRESENT MIGHT WELL PROVE COUNTERPRODUCTIVE. END SUMMARY

1. REMAKRS LEADING TO MS. PARKER'S CONCLUSION THAT HKG MIGHT BE RECEPTIVE TO SETTLING VIETNAMESE REFUGEES IN HONG KONG WERE APPARENTLY RESULT OF INFORMAL DINNER CONVERSATION WITH HK IMMIGRATION DIRECTOR ROWLANDS AT WHICH NO CONGENOFFS WERE PRESENT. THEY WERE AN AMPLIFICATION OF REMARKS DURING MS. PARKER'S CALL ON ROWLANDS AND HK POLAD DONALD REPORTED IN HONG KONG 5221, PARA FIVE.

2. PRESS REPORTS CITING BOTH SENATOR FONG AND AMBASSADOR BROWN ON THIS SUBJECT HAVE LED TO THE HKG'S ISSUING THE

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FOLLOWING PRESS STATEMENT:

BEGIN QUOTE: COMMENTING ON A REPORT FROM WASHINGTON THAT HONG KONG IGH BE WILLING TO SETTLE SOME REFUGEES FROM SOUTH VIETNAM IF INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE IS RECEIVED, A GOVERNMENT SPOKESMAN SAID THAT THE GOVERNMENT WAS GIVING FIRST PRIORITY TO FINDING PERMANENT SETTLEMENT FOR THE REFUGEES IN OTHER COUNTRIES AND WILL CONTINUE TO DO SO. HE ADDED THAT DESPITE OUR CONSIDERABLE PROBLEMS OF OVERCROWDING WE WILL NATURALLY BE PREPARED TO PLAY OUR PART IN ACCEPTING REFUGEES WHO HAVE FAMILY LINKS WITH HONG KONG, BUT IN THE CONTEXT OF THE INTERNATIONAL PROBLEM OF SETTLING THESE REFUGEES, IT WOULD BE UNREASONABLE TO EXPECT HONG KONG TO PROVIDE HOMES FOR LARGE NUMBERS OF THEM. END QUOTE.

3. IN DISCUSSING THIS ISSUE WITH ROWLANDS, HE INDICATED THAT THE PUBLICATION OF THE REPORT HAD CAUSED CONSIDERABLE NUMBER OF INQUIRIES IN HONG KONG FROM THOSE WHO WERE CONCERNED OVER HONG KONG'S CHINESE REFUGEE PROBLEMS, THE CONTINUING PROBLEMS OF SQUATTERS, AND THE NEED FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF HONG KONG'S NOW-POSTPONED 10-YEAR PLANS FOR DEVELOPING HOUSING, EDUCATION, AND OTHER PUBLIC FACILITIES TO MEET THE NEEDS OF HONG KONG'S PRESENT POPULATION. THUS, THE HKG STATEMENT WAS NECESSARY BUT HE CAREFULLY INDICATED SOME OF THE ABMI-GUITIES INHERENT WITHIN THE STATEMENT.

4. SPEAKING PRIVATELY AND VERY CONFIDENTIALLY, ROWLANDS INDICATED THAT HKG WAS PROCEEDING ON COURSE WITH EFFORTS TO INTERNATIONALIZE THE CURRENT VIETNAMESE REFUGEE PROBLEM IN HONG KONG. HE HAS ALREADY CALLED IN THE COMMON MARKET REPRESENTATIVES HERE TO PRESS THEM TO ACCEPT REFUGEES AND IS NOW CALLING IN THE NON-COMMON MARKET EUROPEANS. ALONG WITH THE CANADIANS (WHO ARE ALREADY PROCESSING VIETNAMESE REFUGEES) AND THE AUSTRALIANS, WE WILL BE CALLED IN NEXT WEEK. ROWLANDS HOPES THAT, THROUGH THIS PROCESS, THOSE REFUGEES HAVING CONNECTIONS IN OTHER COUNTRIES OR STRONG VIEWS ON WHERE THEY WISH TO SETTLE WILL BE MOVED OUT. HE CONSIDERS THAT 2,000 OR MORE OF THE ALMOST 3,900 WILL BE HANDLED RATHER RAPIDLY IN THIS PROCESS. THE RESIDUE--THOSE WITH NO CLAIMS, NO RELATIVES IN FOREIGN COUNTRIES, NO REAL SKILLS--WILL THEN BE LEFT AND THAT WILL BE THE TIME TO TALK

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ABOUT WHAT TO DO WITH THEM. HE INDICATED THAT HKG WOULD HAVE TO MAKE "SOME GESTURE" TOWARDS RESETTLING THESE (AS WELL AS ATTEMPTING TO ENCOURAGE TOHER COUNTRIES TO TAKE A SHARE OF THEM). ROWLANDS CAUTIONED, HOWEVER, THAT ANY PUBLIC VENTING OF THIS POSSIBILITY AT THIS TIME WOULD ONLY MAKE IT MORE DIFFICULT FOR HKG TO BE FORTHCOMING WHEN THE REAL CRUNCH COMES. ROWLANDS REITERATED HIS VIEWS ON THE POSSIBILITY OF VIETNAMESE ORPHAS REMAINING HERE FOR ADOPTION LOCALLY.

5. IN SUM, THE MESSAGE CLEARLY IS THAT HKG WILL BE AS FORTHCOMING AS POSSIBLE AFTER THOSE WHO CAN READILY BE SETTLED ELSEWHERE HAVE BEEN TAKEN CARE OF BUT ANY PUBLIC DISCUSSION OF THIS POSSIBILITY AT THIS TIME WILL PROBABLY PROVE COUNTERPRODUCTIVE.

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